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ABSTRACT

A brief glimpse of the on-going process of loanword borrowing in a bilingual culture is accompanied by frequent examples. The phenomenon described as "reverse borrowings of English corruptions" refers to linguistic occurrences in which the native speaker adapts a loanword which is, in fact, a corrupted version of his native language which he does not recognize. (RL)

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Patricia G. Adkins

REVERSE BORROWINGS OF ENGLISH CORRUPTIONS OF SPANISH

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IT is well known that English has consistently borrowed from the Spanish language. We reach out naturally for loan words from our neighbor to the south.[1] Elements which we in the Southwest term "Mexicanisms" pervade the English language, giving it charm and color.

Native speakers of Spanish are found in the United States in extremely large numbers in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Southern California. They move freely from the Spanish tongue to English, intermingling Spanish expressions in their spoken English. Monolingual English speakers use many Spanish expressions in their conversations without recognizing that they have become an integral part of their language.[2]

Television is an important vehicle today for presenting many Spanish loan words on western programs. Expressions such as *bronco, mustang, corral, plaza, canyon, arroyo* and *loco* are commonly used by cowboys on the television screen. *Siesta, amigo, compadre, rodeo, pronto,* and *bonanza* are additional terms familiar to viewers across the country. All of these words had their origins in the Spanish language and have been borrowed into English.[3] Some have been adopted because there were no adequate words in the English language. Others have come in through acculturation.

Bonanza, a term originally used by the Spaniards in mining, meant prosperity. We have accepted it into English in that sense as well as in the sense of hitting a rich strike. Today it is the name of a popular television program with a western setting. The word *mustang,* from the Spanish *mestengo* meaning wild horse, has been appropriated by a leading automobile manufacturer as a trade name for a sports car.

The bird which we call a *road-runner* gets its name from the chaparral of Mexico, a bird of the desert which nests under the *chaparro,* or scrub oak of the Southwest. In the *Dictionary of Spanish Terms in English,* Bentley stresses the color and picturesqueness of the Spanish terms which we have included in English.[4] We accept these so widely in our language that a nationally-marketed petroleum company has used both the loan word *chaparral* and the English *road-runner* in advertising its road-running gasoline. In Arizona the chaparral is the state emblem and is used by dress manufacturers in Phoenix as a trade mark. "High Chaparral," a new television series recently introduced to the nation, has a western setting of scrub oak ranch country.

A word for which we have no equivalent in English is *tortilla,* a cornmeal pancake-type bread so far removed from the idea of either hotcakes or bread that

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1 H. L. Mencken, *The American Language* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 191-192.

2 T. M. Pearce, "The English Language in the Southwest," *New Mexico Historical Review,* VII (1932), 210-232.

3 Mary S. Serjeantson, *A History of Foreign Words in English* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1961).

4 Harold W. Bentley, *A Dictionary of Spanish Terms in English* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925).

it must be considered a true loan word. The *tortilla* is a staple food of Mexico, and countless Anglo-Americans have been educated to its taste. Today *tortillas* may be purchased in grocery stores in the Southwest, if not made by hand at home. From *tortillas* are made the *tacos,* rolled bean or meat concoctions, which are sold at nationally franchised drive-in restaurants called Taco Bell, Taco Box, and Tico Taco.

The Spanish term *patio,* which means an enclosed outdoor living area filled with plants, is not only an architectural feature of many homes in the Southwest but is common to Florida and other states. Our English word *garden* is really not a substitute for it, as it is definitely not a garden as compared to the openness this word envisions.

Frito is an expression taken from the Spanish adjective meaning fried; it is employed by a well-known corn chip manufacturer in the United States. *Fritos* are fried cornmeal strips packaged and sold to be eaten like potato chips or to be used with cheese dips for cocktail parties.

This brief discussion of loan-words from the Spanish substantiates the free use of these terms in English.[5] Now let us consider the reverse borrowing which has taken place, though less frequently, from English to Spanish. These terms, for the most part, have been Spanish words corrupted by native English speakers and then borrowed back by Spanish speakers into their language.

Savvy is a corrupted form of the Spanish verb *saber,* to know. Southwesterners, using an incorrect verb form, use the statement, "I don't savvy." This is also utilized as a question in, "Do you savvy?" when asking if instructions have been understood. It is interesting to note that Spanish-speaking natives, as a result, also use *savvy* incorrectly when speaking their native tongue. This indicates that there are Spanish-speaking Americans who use reverse borrowing of our corruptions of the Spanish language, for the correct verb in Spanish would be *entender,* to understand.

Hoosegow is another colorful example. The Spanish word *juzgar,* to judge, as a verb has a past tense of *juzgado.* From this, *judged* has come to mean jailed as a secondary meaning. We mispronounce and corrupt the word to *hoosegow* in English. Spanish speakers on the border of the United States freely use *hoosegow* to mean *jail,* although the Spanish word for *jail* is not similar in expression, being *cárcel.* It more nearly resembles our English *incarcerate.*

The Spanish *reata* with its feminine article *la* means rope, *la reata,* for catching and tying animals. English speakers through the process of metanalysis changed the word to *lariat.* This change is accepted and used today on the border by native Spanish speakers.

In the western portion of Texas in which El Paso is located there is a well-known story concerning the ten gallon hat of the cowboy. The story is based on the Spanish word *galón* or *braid.* The wide-brimmed hats worn by the Mexicans on the border were originally decorated at the base of the crown with rows of gold braid. The more elaborate had many rows, some as many as ten. This was a decorative aspect, but it also served to denote the wealth of the owner. The Spanish speaker spoke of *diez galones,* meaning ten rows of braid. The English speaker mistakenly translated this as a cognate *ten gallons.* This erroneous translation resulted in the expression of a *ten gallon hat.* This is still commonly in use today by native Spanish speakers, an obvious corruption and reverse borrowing.

[5] Mitford M. Mathews, *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

We have Americanized the Spanish *rancho* to English *ranch*. We have, in addition, called small estates *ranchettes*. It is amusing today to see ranchettes advertised along the border in Mexico. This corruption of the Spanish has been reverse-borrowed by our neighbors.

The river which serves as a boundary between the United States and Mexico is cited on Mexican maps as the *Rio Bravo*. On maps in the United States it is known as the Rio Grande. Mexican residents along the border in Mexico and well into the interior call this river the Rio Grande. Indeed, it is taught by this name in many Mexican elementary schools. It is not until one is near the capital city of Mexico that *Rio Bravo* is heard. This is a border borrowing of our English terminology.

Recently in the border city of Juarez, Mexico, across from El Paso, a modern grocery store was opened. Its sign bears the name *Mexicatessen*, a word which is borrowed and corrupted from the English *delicatessen*. A new restaurant nearby proudly calls itself by the name *Steaketeria*. Its Spanish-speaking owner has borrowed our English *steak* and added his *teria* to it.

Finally, there is the assimilation of the Spanish and English by native English speakers. By this process additional vowels are added to words to make them sound other than English. Typical of this is the *watchee-carro*. American tourists, paying a boy to guard their car while sightseeing in border towns in Mexico, combined the Spanish *carro* for car and the corrupted command form of the English *to watch* to evolve the form *watchee-carro*. This may be a command, a question, or a noun. Young Mexican boys call themselves by this label and solicit business by this interrogative. It is also utilized by the car washing establishments, with slight variation, as *washee-carro*. Perhaps this word should be considered as "pidgin" English, but the coinage has become standard speech with Spanish-speakers in the area. An additional example of this is found when the American tourist wishes to order cake for dessert. Not knowing the Spanish word *pastel* for *cake*, he has coined the word *cakee*. This expression has penetrated into the interior of Mexico, and I have been asked by waiters in Mexico City if I would like to have some "cakee."

Language does not remain static; it is in a constant state of flux. Outside influences will always tend to enrich and color speech. When a neighboring country offers expressions which fill a need, that expression will be borrowed. This has always been a factor in our bilingual cultures in the Southwest.

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